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U. S. Department of Agriculture

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Monday, June 7, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "THE CHOCOLATE TREE." Approved by Federal Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Homemakers, what'll it be? Coffee, cocoa, or iced tea? I'll take cocoa, if you please, from the bean of the curious chocolate trees.

And the chocolate tree is curious. It grows to an average height of 16 to 30 feet, begins bearing fruit at three or four years, and continues to about forty.

The beans -- from which cocoa and chocolate are made -- grow in large pods, seven to twelve inches long. The pods spring directly from the main trunk of the tree, without any nearby foliage. An odd custom -- if you're used to more conventional trees -- like apples and peaches and pears.

Chocolate and cocoa are not new beverages, by any means. Montezuma, Emperor of the Aztecs, quaffed many a golden cup of chocolate, in his time. He liked his chocolate thick, flavored with vanilla and chili. If you want to serve "Chocolate a la Montezuma," you know the ingredients -- but go easy on the chili.

Now, more about the cocoa beans, that grow 20 to 40 in big golden-yellow or maroon-colored pods, on the trunk and main branches of the chocolate tree, in East Africa, the West Indies, South America, and other tropical countries.

The pods are gathered when fully ripe -- with a cocoa-hook if high on the tree; with a short cutlass if within easy reach. They are piled on the ground, to dry for 24 hours. Then they're opened, and the contents are scooped out, ready to be fermented, so that the beans can be separated, cured, and put in bags, ready to be shipped to various chocolate importers all over the world.

When the cocoa beans reach the manufacturing plant they are cleaned, sorted, and roasted. Then they go through a machine called a "cracker," which cracks the shells and breaks the kernels into small pieces called "cocoa-nibs," or "cracked cocoa." A machine known as the "fanner" separates the shells from the cocoa-nibs.

Now comes the important process of blending. Each manufacturer blends the product of different plantations, and different countries, so that the chocolate and cocoa he sells will have the best possible flavor and aroma.

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In the home kitchen, chocolate should be kept cool, and in a covered, light-proof container. Sometimes chocolate takes on a "white" appearance. This generally indicates that it has been kept in an over-warm place. When pure chocolate is subjected to a temperature of above 80 degrees Fahrenheit, it begins to soften and melt, and part of the cocoa butter rises to the surface. When the temperature is lowered, so that the chocolate becomes hard again, the outside will show a thin covering of congealed cocoa butter, which looks "white" in contrast to the brown of the chocolate itself.

However, the white appearance is no indication that the chocolate is unwholesome. If it's melted again, and cooled at the right temperature, it will resume its original color. The main thing for the homemaker to remember is to keep chocolate cool and clean, and in covered containers that shut out the light.

Now to change the subject abruptly -- How many of you know about the Conference on Cocoa Beans, held ten years ago in New York City? Probably you've never heard of it -- although if it were not for you -- and all other consumers in the United States, the Conference would never have been called.

Many importers were there -- many representatives of the big chocolate companies. You'd recognize some of the names -- they're on the cans of cocoa and chocolate you've been buying for years and years. Also, at this conference, were representatives of the United States Department of Agriculture, and a Cocoa Examiner from the United States Treasury Department.

The purpose of the Cocoa Bean Conference was to discuss the best means of handling the inspection of cocoa. For, under the Federal Food and Drugs Act, all those bags of cocoa beans we were discussing a moment ago are inspected as soon as they reach the United States.

Homemakers know they can depend on cocoa and chocolate products. In fact, we've come to take high quality for granted. Little do we realize how much hard work there is -- behind a piece of chocolate fudge. We never stop to think that the breakfast cocoa we buy is wholesome and good because of the cooperation of importers, manufacturers, and Federal Food and Drug officials.

Just let me quote a line from one of the Cocoa Bean Conferees -- who was discussing better cocoa for the United States. He stated: "We want to keep bad cocoa out of the lots intended for the United States. Bad cocoa can't come to the United States."

Well, that's their story, and they stick to it, and that's why Mr. Campbell, Chief of the Federal Food and Drug Administration, was able to state, in his annual report for 1936: "Only sixteen-hundredths of one percent of the cocoa beans inspected were refused entry because of the presence of moldy or unfit beans."

And it may interest you to know that the United States is the world's greatest manufacturer and largest consumer of cocoa products, last year's importations amounting to more than 600 million pounds.

If you want to know more about cocoa -- and chocolate -- definitions for all these products which come under the supervision of the Federal Food and Drugs Act, write to the Federal Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, for Service and Regulatory Announcements, Food and Drug No. 2.
